

GENEVIEVE

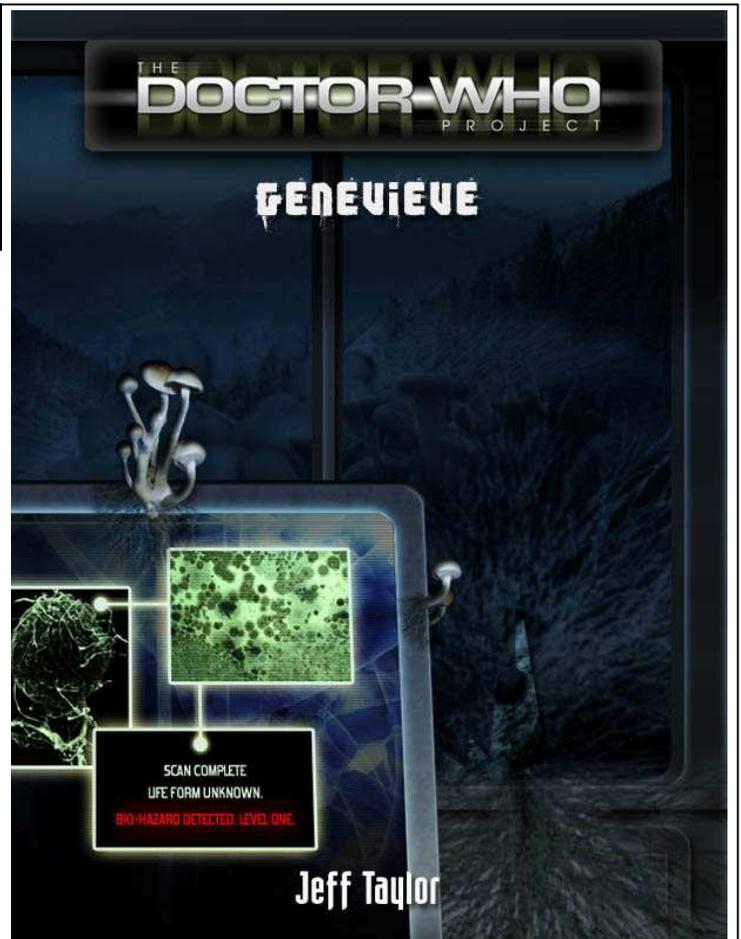
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Season 34/Story 10H
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Green fingers are the order of the day on Genevieve, an Earth colony planet in the Excalibur System, where the population enjoys the benefits of a less industrialized society. In fact, if you've ever seen an episode of the 1970s BBC sitcom *The Good Life* you'll have some idea of what Genevieve is all about: an agricultural environment in which advanced technologies have been abandoned in favour of a more rustic way of life. The story opens by describing the natural beauties of Genevieve through the keen eyes of two of its inhabitants: a widow named Mary Anne and a young mother called Sarah. These characters offer the reader a window onto the alien world that forms the backdrop of Jeffrey C. Taylor's *Genevieve*, a finely written tale that pays careful attention to its setting and characters.

Since there are very few genuine paradises in the world of Who it is not long before a seemingly harmless mushroom appears to blight Genevieve's verdant landscape. In the meantime, the Doctor and Silver have arrived on Genevieve for the purpose of showing Silver one of Earth's many colony worlds. In no time at all the Time Lord and his companion make the acquaintance of the "fungal analogue", along with Mary Anne's now ownerless cat Mortimer. Amusingly, the feline freeloader takes very little time to find a new family in the two newly arrived time travellers. The Doctor soon encounters his first human victim of the fungus and quickly calls for a general retreat, seemingly well aware of the final outcome of this viral assault.

As the fungal invader spreads its spores throughout animal and vegetable alike the local physician, Dr. Livingstone, finds himself weighing up to whom he should offer the final drug supplies left to him. The way in which the doctor assesses the various merits of his staff, and finally decides to sacrifice the inexperienced Polly in favour of the more practiced Elizabeth is powerfully written stuff. It also provides the reader with some meaty food for thought in terms of what makes one person any more valuable than another - if, that is, that is not an already bankrupted brand of moral reasoning.

The Doctor's apocryphal conclusion as to the fate of Genevieve is incredibly well set out in the final pages and lends his character a gravity, which sets it apart from his predecessor. Moreover, his final conversation with Dr. Livingstone is particularly poignant. Of course, it is easy to imagine all the doom and gloom heading towards a fantastically unexpected solution, but in this case the answer is already there in the history book. And for the keen follower of *TDWP* this situation ought to trigger memories of Miles Reid's *The White Death*, which also involved a viral



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threat and the fixed nature of history. On this occasion, however, there is no Taryn to threaten time and the Doctor's relationship with Silver enables him to chastise her ignorance of the future without souring their relationship.

Jeffrey C. Taylor is an author with a keen eye for detail. One example of this meticulous approach involves Mortimer, Mary Anne's feline companion. His nightly patrol of the garden is given its own paragraph, replete with the requisite nocturnal imagery, which perfectly pictures his crafty figure. In fact, as the story progresses Mortimer takes up more and more page space, subtly pressing his claim for TARDIS crew membership. Another example, which is particularly well played out, is the Doctor's perspective on the fungus. Rather than witnessing its rapacity as essentially wrong he views its incredible growth as simply the result of natural instinct. The regret with which

the Doctor recognizes that this life form must be culled, in order to protect the wider human community, emphasizes the Time Lord's much broader standpoint on life.

Finally, it is decidedly ironic that Genevieve's pastoral society, which largely shuns industrial technology, should come under threat from a rampant, all-consuming organic nasty, as opposed to one of the technological variety. *Genevieve* is a very good story, and although its deadly-viral-plant theme is out of the same box as John Gordon's

New Beginning its style of delivery is sufficiently different to give the reader a fresh angle on the eco-tale. And along with the wonderfully written Mortimer 'interludes', and its well judged pace, Jeffrey C. Taylor gives the *Doctor Who* devotee a highly satisfying offering of fan fiction to get their teeth sunk into.

Rating: 9/10